AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1864

Abraham Lincoln vs George B. McClellan

A 105-minute lesson on the 1864 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Civil War	ELECTORAL VOTES 233 total
WINNER Abraham Lincoln (Republican) · 212 EV	RUNNER-UP George B. McClellan (Democratic) · 21 EV
KEY ISSUE Continuation of the Civil War; emancipation; terms of Southern reconstruction	TURNOUT 76.3%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
4. Primary source B (DBQ pair)
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7. Answer key + discussion

1864: Abraham Lincoln vs George B. McClellan

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in U.S. politics by 1864 that would make Lincoln's re-election uncertain. For each, identify the specific 1861-1864 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1864 election is the structural test case of whether constitutional democracy can survive civil war. The first U.S. presidential election held during a major war and the first to feature voting by deployed soldiers in the field. The result determined whether the United States would continue the war to defeat the Confederacy and end slavery, or negotiate a peace that might preserve both Southern independence and slavery. The election's structural significance was the demonstration that constitutional democracy could function under wartime conditions - a precedent that has governed every subsequent wartime election in U.S. history, including World War II (1944), the Korean War (1952), the Vietnam War (1968, 1972), the Iraq War (2004), and the post-9/11 era (every election since 2002). The political situation was grim by summer 1864. The Civil War had begun in April 1861 after eleven Southern states seceded from the Union following Lincoln's 1860 election. The first three years of fighting had cost an estimated 400,000 Union and Confederate dead. Confederate General Robert E. Lee's May-June 1864 campaign against Union General Ulysses S. Grant's Overland Campaign had produced 65,000 Union casualties without breaking Lee's army. The Petersburg siege began June 15, 1864 and would last 292 days. The July 30, 1864 Battle of the Crater (a Union assault on Petersburg that failed catastrophically with 5,300 Union casualties) deepened Northern despondency. Lincoln himself doubted he could win re-election. On August 23, 1864, he wrote the "blind memorandum" acknowledging that he expected to lose and committing to cooperate with his successor (likely McClellan) to maximize Union war efforts before the March 4, 1865 inauguration. The memorandum is one of the most-quoted Lincoln documents and one of the founding examples of constitutional commitment to peaceful transition during active war. The Republican Party - facing potential defeat - rebranded as the "National Union Party" for the 1864 cycle, attempting to attract War Democrats who supported the

war but might not vote Republican. The June 7-8, 1864 National Union Convention in Baltimore renominated Lincoln on the first ballot. The Convention replaced Vice President Hannibal Hamlin (a Maine Republican) with Andrew Johnson, a War Democrat from Tennessee. The strategic logic: a Lincoln-Johnson ticket could attract War Democrats and Border State voters. The decision would prove politically catastrophic after Lincoln's assassination - Johnson's opposition to Reconstruction would lead to his 1868 impeachment (he survived removal by one Senate vote).

The Democratic Party met in Chicago on August 29-31, 1864. The party split between War Democrats and Peace Democrats (Copperheads, led by Clement Vallandigham of Ohio). The party platform - drafted by Vallandigham - declared the war "a failure" and called for "immediate efforts ... for a cessation of hostilities." The nominee was General George B. McClellan. McClellan was a War Democrat who publicly repudiated the Peace plank of his own party's platform on September 8, 1864 - producing an incoherent campaign. George H. Pendleton of Ohio (a Peace Democrat) was the Democratic vice presidential candidate.

The political environment transformed dramatically in late summer and fall 1864. The August 5, 1864 victory of Admiral David Farragut at Mobile Bay closed the Confederacy's last major Gulf port. The September 2, 1864 capture of Atlanta, Georgia by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman opened the deep South to Union invasion. General Philip Sheridan's October 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign destroyed the Confederacy's last major food-producing region. The combined military successes made the McClellan-Pendleton "war is a failure" platform unsustainable.

The 1864 election was the first U.S. presidential election in which soldiers could vote in the field. Nineteen states passed special laws allowing soldier voting. The soldier vote went heavily to Lincoln - 78 percent of identified soldier ballots.

Lincoln won 212 electoral votes to McClellan's 21. McClellan carried only Delaware (3 EV), Kentucky (11 EV), and New Jersey (7 EV). Lincoln won 55.0 percent of the popular vote: 2,218,388 to 1,812,807. Three Confederate states had Reconstruction governments by November 1864 - Louisiana, Tennessee, and Arkansas - but Congress refused to count their electoral votes. The eleven seceded states did not vote.

Lincoln was inaugurated for his second term on March 4, 1865. His Second Inaugural Address - 698 words - emphasized reconciliation: "With malice toward none, with charity for all." Five weeks later, on April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House. Five days after Appomattox, on April 14, 1865 (Good Friday), John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC. Lincoln died the next morning. Andrew Johnson became the 17th president.

Johnson's presidency would produce the Reconstruction conflict that defined the 1865-1877 period. Johnson - despite being a Unionist - was a white-supremacist

		Democrat fundamentally opposed to Black civil rights. His vetoes of Reconstruction legislation, his lenient pardon policy for Confederate leaders, and his 1866 fight with Congress over the 14th Amendment produced the 1867 Reconstruction Acts (passed over his vetoes) and his February 1868 impeachment (he survived removal by one Senate vote). The 13th Amendment (ratified December 6, 1865) abolished slavery. The 14th Amendment (ratified July 9, 1868) constitutionalized birthright citizenship and equal protection. The 15th Amendment (ratified February 3, 1870) prohibited race-based denial of voting rights. The Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) attempted to integrate the formerly enslaved into American constitutional democracy; the 1877 Compromise effectively ended Reconstruction and produced the Jim Crow era that would dominate Southern politics until the 1960s civil rights movement.
20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Civil War
The 1861-1865 war between the United States and the Confederate States of America. Around 620,000 soldiers died. The war ended slavery in the United States via the December 1865 Thirteenth Amendment.

Copperheads
The Northern Peace Democrats who wanted immediate negotiated peace with the Confederacy. Dominated the 1864 Democratic platform. Led by Clement Vallandigham of Ohio.

Blind memorandum
Lincoln's August 23, 1864 sealed memo committing to cooperate with his successor (likely McClellan) to maximize Union war efforts. One of the founding examples of constitutional commitment to peaceful transition during active war.

Fourteenth Amendment
Ratified July 9, 1868. Established birthright citizenship; required equal protection of the laws; reduced congressional representation for states denying voting rights; prohibited federal/state public officeholding by former Confederate officials. The constitutional foundation of modern American civil rights law.

Andrew Johnson impeachment
The February 24, 1868 House impeachment of Johnson over violations of the Tenure of Office Act. The Senate trial in March-May 1868 acquitted Johnson by one vote (35-19; two-thirds needed for removal). The first U.S. presidential impeachment.

National Union Party
The 1864 name for the Republican Party. Used to attract War Democrats and Border State voters. The June 1864 National Union Convention renominated Lincoln and replaced VP Hannibal Hamlin with Andrew Johnson.

Atlanta Campaign
The May-September 1864 Union military campaign under General William Tecumseh Sherman to capture Atlanta. Atlanta fell September 2, 1864. The victory transformed Lincoln's re-election prospects from likely defeat to landslide victory.

Thirteenth Amendment
Ratified December 6, 1865. Abolished slavery and involuntary servitude (except as punishment for crime). The first of the three Reconstruction Amendments.

Fifteenth Amendment
Ratified February 3, 1870. Prohibited federal or state denial of voting rights based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The third of the Reconstruction Amendments.

Second Inaugural Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, MARCH 4, 1865

Lincoln took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1865 - four months after the November 1864 landslide and five weeks before his assassination. The address was 698 words - the second-shortest in U.S. history after Washington's 1793 Second Inaugural. The closing passage on reconciliation is one of the most-quoted in American political rhetoric. The address combined theological reflection on the war as divine punishment for slavery with a practical call for postwar reconciliation.

> *"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations. Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.""*

Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1865). Public domain.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

Second Inaugural Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, MARCH 4, 1865

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations. Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."”

Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1865). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Blind Memorandum

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AUGUST 23, 1864

“This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration, as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.”

Lincoln, "Memorandum on Probable Failure of Re-election" (Washington, DC, August 23, 1864). Public domain.

The 1864 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Lincoln's Second Inaugural) that articulates the reconciliation framework. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (blind memorandum) that articulates Lincoln's commitment to cooperation with his successor. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources are Lincoln documents but they address different aspects of the wartime political situation. Identify the specific aspect each source addresses.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B was written before Atlanta's fall; Source A was written after the November 1864 landslide and after the December 1864 march to the sea. What does the temporal gap tell you about how Lincoln's political situation transformed?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source A says "with malice toward none, with charity for all." Identify two specific Reconstruction-era developments that violated Lincoln's reconciliation framework, and explain whether Lincoln's framing could have been implemented.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which 1865 constitutional amendment abolished slavery?

( ) A. Thirteenth
( ) B. Fourteenth
( ) C. Fifteenth
( ) D. Sixteenth

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Who assassinated Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865?

( ) A. Lewis Powell
( ) B. George Atzerodt
( ) C. John Wilkes Booth
( ) D. David Herold

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1864 election structural, contingent, or foundational? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Lincoln's 1864 "blind memorandum" (Source B) commits in advance to cooperating with a successor whose election would, in Lincoln's view, "secure his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards." Lincoln's 1865 Second Inaugural (Source A) frames the war's violence as divine punishment for slavery and calls for postwar reconciliation. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1861-1868 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1864 election's successful operation under wartime conditions was (a) a structural test of American constitutional democracy that the system passed because of institutional design and Lincoln's specific decisions, (b) a contingent outcome of military success in September 1864 that made Lincoln's pre-Atlanta commitment to peaceful transition politically irrelevant, or (c) the foundational moment of the modern doctrine that elections are conducted regardless of war conditions. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the structural-vs-contingent-vs-foundational axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Atlanta campaign, the Copperhead Democratic platform, the soldier vote, the Lincoln assassination, the Johnson impeachment. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "with malice toward none, with charity for all", "to bind up the nation's wounds", "to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace". The "malice toward none, charity for all" phrase is the cleanest articulation.

Lincoln's framing became the rhetorical baseline for moderate Reconstruction.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration", "he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards". The "duty to so co-operate" phrase is the cleanest articulation.

AP students should recognize the constitutional commitment to peaceful transition during war.

QUESTION 3

Source A addresses the postwar political situation: how to reconcile a country torn apart by civil war and how to interpret the war's extraordinary cost. Source B addresses the pre-November-1864 political situation: how to maintain the Union war effort during an expected peaceful transition to a hostile administration. The two sources together cover the political arc from Lincoln's expected loss (August 1864) through his actual victory (November 1864) to his second-term governance (March 1865). The arc demonstrates how Lincoln navigated multiple political possibilities while maintaining constitutional commitment to each.

AP students should recognize that wartime presidential leadership requires preparing for multiple political outcomes simultaneously.

QUESTION 4

The seven-month gap covers the September 2, 1864 fall of Atlanta, the October 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign, the November 8, 1864 election, the December 21, 1864 capture of Savannah by Sherman, the January 31, 1865 House passage of the 13th Amendment, and the February 3, 1865 Hampton Roads peace conference (which failed). The temporal gap reveals how rapidly Lincoln's political situation transformed: in August he expected to lose; by November he had won a landslide; by March he was inaugurating a second term and beginning to plan Reconstruction. The structural lesson: a wartime political situation can transform completely in months when military operations succeed.

AP students should be able to articulate how military success can transform political possibility.

QUESTION 5

Lincoln's "malice toward none, charity for all" framework was violated by: (1) Andrew Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policy that allowed former Confederate officials to resume political power - violating "charity for all" by extending charity primarily to white Southerners rather than to newly freed Black Americans. (2) The 1866 Black Codes passed by Southern legislatures restricting Black civil rights and labor mobility. (3) Congress's 1867 Reconstruction Acts imposing military rule on the South - violating "malice toward none" by treating Southern states as conquered territory. (4) The Ku Klux Klan's 1865-1872 campaign of racial terrorism. (5) The 1877 Compromise that effectively ended Reconstruction and produced the Jim Crow era. Lincoln's framework may have been politically impossible: it assumed that white Southerners would accept Black civil rights without coercion. The Reconstruction-era developments demonstrate that the framework was structurally unrealistic.

AP students should be able to engage Lincoln's framing analytically rather than just accept it.

QUESTION 6

Thirteenth. Ratified December 6, 1865. Abolished slavery and involuntary servitude (except as punishment for crime). The first of the three Reconstruction Amendments.

AP students should know the Thirteenth Amendment and its date.

QUESTION 7

John Wilkes Booth. The Maryland-born actor and Confederate sympathizer who shot Lincoln at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865 (Good Friday). Booth was killed by federal forces twelve days later in Virginia. Eight conspirators were tried; four were executed.

AP students should know Booth and the basic facts of the Lincoln assassination.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the structural-vs-contingent-vs-foundational axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source. Award credit for any defensible thesis that meets these three conditions.

The thesis sketch is preparatory. The LEQ rubric evaluates the full essay.